



**Alberta**  
AGRICULTURE, FOOD AND  
RURAL DEVELOPMENT  
4-H Branch

[www.4h.ab.ca](http://www.4h.ab.ca)

## ALBERTA 4-H PROJECT MANUAL



# Young Horse Project

MEMBER GUIDE



Title Sponsor - Equine Program

## The 4-H Motto

*"Learn to Do by Doing"*



## The 4-H Pledge

*I pledge*

*My **Head** to clearer thinking,*

*My **Heart** to greater loyalty,*

*My **Hands** to larger service,*

*My **Health** to better living,*

*For my club, my community, and my country.*

## The 4-H Grace

(Tune of Auld Lang Syne)

*We thank thee, Lord, for blessings great  
on this, our own fair land.*

*Teach us to serve thee joyfully,  
with head, heart, health and hand.*

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# INTRODUCTION

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## **Welcome to the 4-H Young Horse Project**

Congratulations on having successfully completed the mandatory Horsemanship Project Levels 1-3. You now have basics that will be important for the successful completion of the Young Horse Project. We hope you will have a fantastic year developing new skills and teaching your project horse new things as you continue to develop your horse knowledge and experience.

## **What is considered a 'young horse'?**

This project is here to help you teach and train the horse that has had no real 'schooling'. The young horse project is developed for a weanling, yearling or two to three year old animal. However, this project is not necessarily restricted to a certain 'age' of horse, rather it is the amount of training or handling that determines whether you are eligible to take part in the young horse project. If you have a horse that is five years old, but has never been handled, then the young horse project is for you. As well, if you have a weanling (a horse that has been separated from its mother), then the young horse project is for you.

This manual should guide your training of the young horse so that both you and your horse have a successful year.

## **Are there any considerations when selecting a young horse project?**

Project selection should be determined by the individual member's physical capabilities, horsemanship experience, leader recommendations, and parental consent. It is important that the member be comfortable handling horses in general before taking on a young horse project. It requires a sound understanding of general horsemanship in order to be successful teaching a young animal. Although it is not mandatory that you have previous experience with horsemanship levels 4-7 before attempting the young horse project, it would be recommended. This would ensure a good understanding of horses and horsemanship skills.

When working with horses that have not had any formal training, it is preferable to work with one that has never been touched than to attempt to 're-train' a horse that has not worked out for someone else. Horses have an amazing memory and will remember the 'bad' things that have happened to them much longer and persistently than they ever remember the 'good' stuff. It is sometimes important to know 'why' a horse is misbehaving in order to successfully 'fix' it. This is not always possible when you are working with a horse that someone else has wrecked.

## Clinics and resources

Each 4-H member is encouraged to get involved in clinics. The most useful clinics to you will be those geared toward teaching ground manners, round pen work or starting horses under saddle. It is also beneficial to read about or watch 'problem' horses being worked with by a knowledgeable horse person. Sometimes seeing someone 'fix' a problem a horse is having will prevent you from making the same mistakes.

Most problems with horses are 'man-made'. Horses learn what they are taught! There are a great number of books and videos geared toward training and starting horses. Choose those that have been recommended by knowledgeable horse people. Sometimes the non-resistance methods used by some horse people are too complex to be attempted by 4-H members with little experience. Be wary of 'quick fixes' and use the method that makes sense to you and your horse's situation.

### What about all the advice people want to offer?

If you take on a young horse project, everyone will want to give you advice about how to handle or train your horse. Some of the advice will make sense to you and some won't. Don't act on any advice unless it makes sense to you and fits your situation. Your ability and the sensitivity of your horse may vary. Be alert and rational with your actions so neither you or your horse will get hurt. Along with the information you acquire, the member must apply common sense since he or she is solely responsible for his or her own actions.

## Horse and rider assessment

The young horse project has been divided into seven levels. At each level there are a number of assessment tools that will be used in order to determine whether you have been successful.

Most of these will be straight forward and easy to determine.

Some of it will be theory that is important for a clearer understanding of horse training.

Some will involve practical hands-on skills. For example, if you can correctly pick up all four of your project horse's feet, then you have been successful in this area.

The method of assessing the member and the project horse is up to the club leader and member to determine.

There are some suggestions at the end of this manual to help guide the leader and member in the assessment of the young horse project.

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## OBJECTIVES

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The goal of the young horse project is to provide an opportunity for the 4-H member to:

- gain an understanding of how a horse learns and thinks.
- understand the relationship between the age of the horse and expectations in training.
- develop the skill to successfully teach a horse new things.
- develop the horse's ability to have respect and trust in people, to be able to focus on the work at hand and be willing to learn new things.
- understand the equipment necessary to work with the 'green' unbroke horse or weanling during various stages in its training.
- understand how to feed a young horse so that it reaches its growth and performance potential.
- enjoy working with an untrained horse of any age 'shaping' its behavior around people.

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## OVERVIEW OF THE **YOUNG HORSE PROJECT**

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The young horse project is exciting in that you have the opportunity to 'shape' a horse's way of behaving around people. You have the opportunity to determine how your horse will react to new things as you begin the training process.

Generally speaking, horses love to please, and want to do the right thing. However, it is important that you always teach it what you want before you expect it to know what to do. There is nothing more frustrating and frightening for a horse than to be asked to do something new and not knowing what to do, it tries to do what it thinks you want. If it then makes a mistake and you jerk on it, it will become very nervous about working with people. Sometimes you undo a lot of training that you have been working on when you treat a horse unfairly in this way.

Make the horse's experience with people a positive one. The success you have is based on your own thoughtfulness and understanding. Make sure your knowledge base is good enough to handle the situation. Be humble and ask for help when you need to. Be proud when your work pays off!

### **Requirements**

#### **What do I need once I have my horse?**

You will need a variety of equipment to train and work with your young or green horse. As well, you will need a safe area to do the work in.

The kinds of equipment that you will need will depend entirely on what age of horse you are working with and what you are teaching the horse at the time. For example, you will not need a saddle, bridle or lungeing cavesson for a weanling. A weanling will only need to be halter broke, handled for vaccinations, worming, trimming feet and general on-the-ground training.

As the horse gets older, more equipment for training is necessary. A three year old may be ready to ride at some point during the year of training and handling. In this case you would need a saddle, blanket and possibly a bridle with a snaffle bit.

## Equipment

The following is a brief outline of the types of equipment that may be necessary to have on hand at one time or another when teaching a young or green horse throughout the 4-H year.

- well fitting halter, either nylon or leather
- long (8-10 feet) sturdy cotton shank
- small whip (25-36 feet)
- soft lariat rope or nylon web lunge line
- inner tube from a tire
- solid post or tying ring
- saddle - preferably with back cinch
- saddle pad
- lungeing cavesson
- lungeing surcingle
- lunge whip
- side reins
- plastic bags, gunny sack, sacking blanket

## Proper Fit

The equipment used should fit the horse correctly. Sometimes a horse will be reacting to poorly fitting equipment when you think it is misbehaving. Training and teaching will go much more smoothly if the halter or bridle is adjusted properly, or the saddle fits correctly.

## Personal Attire

Anyone handling young or green horses should be properly dressed. Many unexpected things can occur that may cause some injury to the handler.

You should wear the following things when working with young horses:

- gloves
- boots (possibly steel toed work boots for ground work)
- helmet (approved ASTM/SEI)

## What type of area should I have to train my young horse?

The area that you will need to work with a young or green horse must be *safe* and *secure*. Often times unexpected things will happen where the horse may get away from the handler. It is important that the area be secure enough that the horse will not escape and hurt itself.

## Types of Areas

**Arena** - indoor or outdoor

**Round Pen** - wooden or steel panel

**Corral** - preferably planks

**Stall**- large

**Pasture** - safely fenced and familiar to horse

### **There are a number of things to keep in mind no matter what area you are working in.**

1. The exterior should be 'solid' looking. It is best not to work young or green horses in an area enclosed by wire, unless there is no other choice. If a horse panics, sometimes it will bolt and run through fences that do not appear to be strong and solid. A wooden fenced area is safest. A corral or round pen is preferable for some of the first lessons.
2. There should be no small corners that the horse could find themselves 'trapped' in during lessons. An open square or round area is best.
3. All gates should be secured before beginning work.
4. Distractions are important when the goal of the lesson is to teach the horse to 'focus' on the work at hand. Distractions at other times are not recommended. Other horses directly beside the working area or scary objects next to the area will only create problems that are not necessary. Try to use a quiet learning environment by working in an area without unusual distractions.
5. If you are working in a stall or smaller corral with a young or green horse, be sure that there is a quick escape route for yourself in case the horse becomes dangerous. Never lock yourself into an area that you cannot get out of easily.
6. If you are using steel panels to create a working area, be sure they are well secured so that they cannot be pushed over by a horse that accidentally hits them during the work.

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# PLANNING YOUR TRAINING SESSIONS

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## Goal Setting

The goals of your training program should be logical, considering your experience as the handler and the age and experience of the project horse. You will set both *long term* goals and *short term* goals.

## Long Term Goals

You would establish what you want the horse to be able to do at the end of the 4-H year.

There will be more than one long term goal that should be listed. It will take many sessions to achieve the long term goals.

**Example:** At the end of the 4-H year, my 3 year old quarter horse filly will learn to:

1. lead properly
2. be handled for vaccinations, worming and trimming feet
3. tie easily
4. load and unload from a trailer
5. lunge at walk, jog and lope in both directions
6. be saddled and bridled
7. ground drive in both directions
8. be mounted and unmounted
9. be ridden at a walk in both directions of the arena

## Short Term Goals

A short term goal would be one that would be set for each individual working session.

These goals are very specific and must be simple enough that the horse would be able to learn them after one session of work.

**Example:** The goal for my 3 year old filly today will be to learn how to move away from the pressure of my hand on her sides.

## GUIDE TO **SUCCESSFUL PLANNING:**

<b>Rule</b>	<b>Example</b>	<b>Comments</b>
The goals of a training program should be clear and simple.	I will teach my horse to move away from the pressure of my hand on its side while I work with it on the ground.	The horse should be comfortable being touched, handled and is preferably halter broke. Need an enclosed area, halter and shank.
The method to reach the goal should be understood by the handler.	Place hand on horse's body and apply pressure until the horse moves away from the pressure. Immediately release the pressure when the horse attempts the correct movement. Repeat this until the horse understands and quit when you are successful.	The handler will have a difficult time teaching a concept if the handler is confused about how to teach it successfully to the horse.
Horses learn best when being taught one thing at a time.	Do not teach a horse how to move away from pressure and how to back up in the same session.	The more simple and clear the lesson the more likely the horse will earn it well. Too much in one lesson will make for a confused horse. Try to make everything as "black and white" as possible.
Begin a session with something that reviews what the horse already does well and then begin teaching the horse the new behavior or skill.	When teaching a horse to move away from pressure, the previous lesson may have been "leading". Begin this lesson with a short review of leading the horse around in both directions. Then begin teaching the new concept to the horse.	Horses like to do things correctly. Give them a positive moment by asking them to do something they already know. It is a great way to begin a learning session with a green horse.
Quit when you are ahead.	The horse has moved easily away from the gentle pressure of your hand. It does this easily in both directions. Quit!	Don't ask for too much in the beginning. Over 2 or 3 lessons you can increase the demand. A horse will be more likely to learn the skill well if it is not asked for too much at a time. Learn to be patient.

## **Adjustments to the goals**

Sometimes the goals of a single lesson or the long term goals must be changed because of unforeseen circumstances.

For example, a horse learns very quickly and is easy to teach. You might end up also riding the horse at a jog and a lope by the end of the 4-H year, even though your goal was to only walk the horse.

A lesson where you want to teach the horse to move away from pressure might have to be changed to 'sacking out', when you discover the horse is very scared of things touching it's sides.

*Don't be afraid to change the plans if the horse requires it!*

*Be sensitive to the horse's needs!!*

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## HOW DO HORSES LEARN?

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Understanding how a horse learns best will guide you in your actions while you teach the horse in a positive manner. It would be useless, for example, to carry on a conversation with someone that doesn't understand the English language.

We should try to 'talk' to our horses in a way that they understand.

Forcing horses to do what we want might work temporarily, depending on the temperament of the horse, but to have a willing partner will make for a longer lasting and more successful training process.

### **Horses are creatures of instinct.**

They are what we call 'flight' animals. In the herd, if something scares them, they instantly run! If they can't run and are cornered, then they fight! If this is their instinctual behavior when they are scared or worried, then it is important to understand and work with horses in a manner that promotes a level of trust between you and the horse so they don't run or kick when being worked around.

### **Horses are herd animals.**

Horses feel safest when in the company of other horses. Horses in a herd establish a 'pecking order'. This means that one will be the 'boss' while each one below is dominant over another. This is apparent if you have ever watched a group of horses that are fed grain in a pasture. Each of them tries to get to the piles of grain, with ears laid back, heads lowered, tails swishing, legs raised in warning of a kick, bodies being pushed around, until they all eventually find their own pile of grain. Some horses in the group move willingly away as others come toward them. Other horses might put up a bit of a fight before they move away from the grain pile. Each time a horse is 'pushed' around it shows the pecking order of the group. The 'boss' of the herd is able to push any of the horses.

If you have watched a group of horses that doesn't seem to fight as they find their own grain piles, this will demonstrate that there is an understood pecking order that does not have to be 'discussed' among them. Each knows his position and willingly moves about until the herd is settled.

As a handler of your horse, it is important that you establish yourself as the 'boss' of the 'herd'. This will make all of your training that much easier.

### **Horses learn from consistent handling.**

Horses are animals of routine. You will notice that horses that are fed at the same time each day, will be found 'waiting' for their meal at those times. Horses that are handled in a routine manner will learn quickly. Horses appreciate routine and consistency. As well, if you are consistent in allowing bad behavior, a horse will also learn to behave poorly, not

necessarily because they want to, but because you have allowed or taught them that it is okay. If you are teaching your horse something new, it is important not to expect perfection on the first day. It is through repetition that the horse will soon learn what is expected of him and look forward to doing the correct thing. Nothing is more frustrating to a horse than inconsistent aids. If, for example, you don't want your horse to bolt when you turn to ride towards home, then you must always walk home.

## **Training Good Horse Behavior**

If you understand how a horse 'thinks' and 'learns' best, then it will make it much easier for you to work with your horse. There are four areas that are important to your training program.

## **Guidelines For General Horsemanship**

Your horse must learn to:

- respect you
- trust you
- focus on you
- be willing to work with you

## **Developing respect**

Respect from your horse means that your horse doesn't push into your space when you are working around it and is obedient to your commands.

A horse that respects you will pay attention to your position at all times and is careful not to move into you.

Have you ever walked with your horse, and, when they see something that frightens them, they bump into you as they move away from what scares them?

This is typical behavior for a horse that does not believe that their handler is the 'boss' and someone to be respected.

A horse in the pasture would never accidentally 'bump' into the herd boss! They should be more worried about you than they are about things around them. In fact they should see you as someone that they can rely on in times of apparent danger.

A horse that has developed respect for their handler, does not step on them, bump or push into them.

In order to be successful, you must develop respect from your horse throughout the training program.

Respect for your horse means that you are aware of how a horse 'thinks' and learns.

This allows you to teach your horse in a manner that it can understand.

You shouldn't expect your horse to think like a 'human' and 'know better'.

For example, if every time you mount your horse, you allow it move off right away, don't expect it to stand still on a certain day just because you now want it to.

A horse generally wants to do the right thing and if you find your horse is not doing as you have asked it, then respect for your animal should result in you looking at yourself first. Did you teach the horse how to do what you are now expecting? Did you ask the horse in a clear manner that could not be misinterpreted?

If you are consistent in your teaching and handling of your horse, the respect that each of you develops for the other will pay off!

### **How do I develop respect from my horse?**

Respect from your horse is only developed if you consistently demand it. You must first clearly understand what types of actions and behaviors from your horse show disrespect, so that you can be clear and consistent in teaching your horse that you are someone to be respected.

You are the boss, the leader of the 'herd', and with consistent handling your horse will quickly understand this.

### **Where to begin?**

Handling your horse on the ground is the first place to develop such respect.

If your horse doesn't move away from your hand pressure on its side when you work with him on the ground, how can you expect him to step away from your leg when you are riding him?

Don't expect your horse to do something you haven't taught him. Be consistent.

Treat your horse in a manner that he understands. Remember to 'speak' his language.

### **Guidelines to establish respect**

The following is a list of possible goals or ways of assessing the level of respect that your horse currently has for you.

Each of these desired behaviors should be taught first, then consistently demanded by the handler while working around your horse.

This does not mean that we will not make mistakes and miss correcting some of these misbehaviors, but the majority of our horse's actions around us should show respect.

**Your horse:**

- stands quietly while being haltered, bridled or saddled.
- faces you as you approach it in a pasture or stall.
- walks beside you (not on top of you!) as you lead it.
- keeps its head in its own space when you work around it.
- does not step on your toes.(Believe it or not, horses are very aware of where each of their feet are!)
- is respectful of the lead rope or lunge line when working.
- waits for you to direct it before doing its 'own thing'.

**Developing Respect - Training suggestions:**

1. Understand what is acceptable and not acceptable from your horse. Use the previous guidelines as examples.
2. Prepare yourself mentally so that your response to your horse's bad behavior comes easily and quickly, without having to 'think' about it for too long. Horse's need to be told 'immediately' after good or bad behavior that it is either correct or wrong. You cannot come back after five minutes and punish your horse for something he did wrong. He will not make the connection.
3. Carry a small whip or have the end of the lead shank available to 'bite' the horse's body part that is pushing into you. The 'bite' will simply be a quick and sharp touch with the whip on the area of the horse that has moved into your space.

For example, if your horse walks into you with its shoulder as you are leading it, you should tap the horse's shoulder until it moves away.

Horses understand these 'bites' and quickly learn to respect you if you are clear and consistent. If your horse tends to move his head into your space, for example, then you simply hold your hand or whip up so as to 'block' the unwanted movement of his head. This way you haven't done anything to the horse, it simply has bumped into you.

*Make the right thing easy and the wrong thing difficult. Stand your ground!*

4. Do not pull on your horse's head when your horse misbehaves or moves into you. Horse's do not herd each other around by their heads, so make sure that you 'talk' to the horse in the language they understand - body language. Whatever part of the horse moves into you, (shoulder, for example), this is part of the horse that needs to be 'bitten' by the lead shank, hand, or whip. This does not mean that you 'beat' on your horse when you ask them to move their body out of your space.

Horse's are generally very sensitive (think of what a horse does when they feel a fly land on them). You must use only enough force so that the horse responds.

Even if they don't respond totally right the first time, but at least make an attempt to move away, for example, then you must lighten up on the pressure from the 'bite' so that you are always teaching, not forcing or scaring.

*Horses do not learn when they are fearful.*

*The key is to create a relaxed horse so they can 'think' about what is being taught.*

5. If you want your horse to respect you, don't put your horse into a 'bad' situation. Respect is earned by showing the horse that you are the 'smarter horse'. Don't make the horse to do something that it is not ready for. For example, if you know that your horse is scared of a tarp in your yard, unless you are prepared to teach him not to be worried about it, don't make him go near it. Horses need to gain confidence in themselves and their handlers through success in each situation they are presented with. Set your lessons up so that there is always a chance for success.
6. Be consistent in your handling. Don't demand that your horse keep his distance from you as you lead him into the barn one day and let him run you over the next. Horses learn respect with your consistent treatment of them and learn to 'resent' you if they have inconsistent 'rules'.

## **Developing Trust**

A rider that has developed a level of trust with their horse will be able to bring the horse to a new situation, teach them a new movement or take them to new places without the horse worrying and refusing.

Trust with horses is gained from always treating them fairly.

Don't expect them to know how to do something that you have never taught them to do, then punish them for doing it wrong.

Horses don't stand around deciding to be 'bad'. Their brains don't think in a logical fashion. If your horse is acting confused about you wanting it to 'move sideways' for example, chances are it is confused. You may need to re-teach what you expect your horse to do when you place pressure on its side.

Horse's that are constantly pulling at the bit, may not 'trust' the rider's hands, as they have been 'jabbed' in the mouth countless times while being ridden.

Developing trust in the rider will be a great reward as your horse will attempt new movements and be able to ride forward to scary things as you continue with training.

You need to let them know that you are always on duty, you are there to take care of them so that they can rely on you as the 'boss'.

## **Developing the ability to focus on the work**

Focus from the horse is important when handling or riding a horse.

When a horse focuses on you, it is aware of your position and waits for instruction.

You can't teach a horse something if they are focusing on the other horses in the field beside them.

They need to stay attentive to you as you handle them on the ground or ride them.

### **How do you teach a horse to focus on you?**

First of all, you should stay focused on your horse, so that you are aware of when its attention is 'leaving' the work at hand. Only then can you react properly to its inattentiveness.

As you feel the horse's attention drift away while working it, (keep your eyes on your horse's ear position) you can nudge or give them a cue to do something to gain back their attention. Make them jog more quickly, turn, stop or change direction. Once you have their focus back then resume riding or handling the horse.

Horses focus on the 'boss' of the herd, and if you make the horse move forward, then they focus on you as the boss. You demand attention by asking a horse to move. However, if a horse is moving too much and is fidgeting, then don't stop it, make it move around you. As the horse begins to tire, it will be happy to pay attention to what you want when you ask it to stand still.

### **Do you expect the same focus from all horses?**

Don't expect a young horse to be able to stay focused in the lesson for a long period of time.

If you demand this focus, the horse may become balky, resentful or bored and then begin spooking at things that it normally isn't scared of.

Use good judgment when training.

### **How do you develop a willingness to work?**

A horse that is willing to do what you wish, will make your job as a handler or rider much easier. There isn't a fight to get the horse to go through a gate or over a stream. The horse will look forward to the rides.

After all, you really can't force an 1100 lb horse to do something against its will. Everything in our training must develop a willing attitude.

If you keep the work interesting by changing directions, doing transitions or by riding on the trail and changing patterns, the horse will find pleasure with the rides.

Horses that are rewarded for doing the right thing, are taught in a consistent manner, and are treated fairly are going to develop a willingness to work with you.

A willing horse is one that comes to you when you go to get him from the pasture.

A willing horse has an attitude that says 'What do we do next?'

A willing horse attempts new things with a fresh attitude.

*If your horse is willing to work with you then you will be more successful as a 'team'.*

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# WORKING WITH YOUNG HORSES

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## The Weanling

### What is a 'weanling'?

A weanling is a foal that has been weaned (taken away) from its mother and less than one year old. Normally foals are weaned between four and six months of age. Hopefully, your weanling has been weaned with other foals so that the process didn't put a great deal of stress on it. It is best to wait until the weanling has settled into the life of living without its' mother before beginning to work with it. A freshly weaned foal will not be capable of focusing on a handler as all they can think about is how to get back to their mother. It should be eating hay and grain and drinking water well on its own for a period of time before you make any attempt to begin working with it.

### Where did it come from?

Up until now most of a weanling's training has come directly from the 'herd'. The herd might have consisted of only its mother, but may also have included other foals, mares and horses that were being kept together. People may also have been a part of the foals upbringing if the mare had been handled on a regular basis.

This information might be important to you as a handler. A weanling that has been kept with other horses is more likely to have been taught good strong lessons of 'horse' etiquette. For example, young foals learn very quickly which horse in the pasture is the 'boss', and they become very aware of the signs of when to stay away and when it is okay to get close. Because of this first education, a young foal will already have developed a sense of its own space and that everyone else's is also important. Foals learn many lessons of how to behave from their mothers. For example, if the mother of a foal is difficult to catch and work with, the foal will learn that people are somewhat 'scary' and be more wary around them. Easy going mothers will make for a foal that is usually easy to handle.

## Tips for working with young horses

1. Keep the lessons short - the attention span of a weanling will not be very long. 10 minutes is lots. You might work with your weanling three or four times during the day with these shorter lessons.
2. Don't expect perfection immediately. Horses learn through repetition and consistent handling so expect the weanling to learn over a period of time.
3. Expect the young horse to 'fall back' in its learning once in a while. This is a normal process of learning for horses. They sometimes take one step back for every two steps ahead while learning new things. Don't get frustrated, maintain consistent handling and it will pay off.
4. Work in a safe area. A large stall or small corral is a good place to begin working. When you move out of those areas, be sure that you are still in an enclosed space - even if it

is a pasture. You do not want the horse to 'escape' from you and be free to run where it may injure itself.

5. Make sure that someone is always aware that you are out working with your horse. If they are not right there helping and watching to be sure that all is going well, they at least realize where you are in case something happens. (For example, if you get kicked and are hurt in a stall they will know where to come looking for you.)

## Handling the weanling that has never been touched

### First Touch

Begin handling a weanling simply by hanging around in a small area with it. (A stall or corral is good). Don't ever go in with a weanling that you know has habit of kicking without first reading the section on teaching a weanling not to kick.

Park yourself somewhere in the vicinity of the foal and watch what happens. Soon the weanling will be curious and come up to you. It will be attempting to establish where you belong in the 'pecking order'. Horses always think in terms of 'horses', so it will consider you 'one of the herd'.

As you begin to get close to the weanling and make attempts to touch it, keep the 'blind spot' of a horse in mind. It may not feel secure as you reach toward its head, but if you reach to its wither and begin scratching it (as horses do to each other when they are 'grooming'), then it may begin to relax and accept you touching it. In the beginning, you simply want the weanling to accept you touching it by making it feel comfortable with what you are doing. Weanlings usually like to be scratched and rubbed so begin establishing the relationship in this manner. Soon you will be able to touch it everywhere. Head, neck, body and legs. Be aware of what the weanling is 'thinking' as you move around it and touch it. Watch the eyes, ears and movement of the hind end. A foal learns quickly in the herd to 'kick' out if it feel threatened, so this is an action that may occur.

Establish a level of respect right from the start. Do not let the weanling bite or push you around. A quick tap with your hand should be enough to get it to understand that you are the 'boss' and you have a 'space' around you that should be respected. Try not to back out of the way if the weanling is attempting to move into your space - this will be a sign of 'weakness' for you and it will difficult to establish the 'boss' relationship you will need to have with your weanling. Stand your ground while maintaining a safe position with the weanling and soon it will understand that you are to be respected.

### Kicking and Biting

Foals have a natural tendency to nip and nibble at all sorts of things. This sometimes will include people. It is important to teach your weanling that biting is *not* acceptable. This is one of the only times that you can slap a horse in the mouth and have it make sense to the horse. If you are working around your weanling (actually this is true for a horse of any age) and it bites or attempts to bite, you must immediately slap its mouth with your hand. The

horse will understand after a few times (sometimes less, depending on the personality of the horse and how much it has been let away with the nipping behavior) that biting is not a good thing to do. It does not create a head shy horse because your actions are:

1. immediate and
2. non threatening and
3. done as a response to the horse's bad behaviour. It will make sense to the horse.

Foals and young horses will naturally have an instinct to kick if they feel threatened or surprised unexpectedly. Be aware of this and don't stand in a position where the horse or foal may kick you. If a foal or horse kicks as a bad habit, you should get help from an experienced horse person rather than attempting to solve the problem on your own. *Safety* is number one!

## **Cradling the foal**

Depending on the size of the weanling, (or how big you are) you may be able to wrap your arms around its front and back end while standing beside it. This is often termed 'cradling' the foal. With this position you can begin controlling the movement of the weanling and teach it how to move away from pressure.

### **Position of handler**

1. Stand facing the foal, lined up with its barrel.
2. Bend forward slightly, wrapping your one arm under the neck and around the front of the chest. Wrap the other arm around the buttocks, just above the hock area on the hind end of the foal.
3. Do not bend so that your head is in alignment with the foals head if it rears up.
4. Do not apply heavy pressure to both the front and back of the foal at the same time - it will cause a 'panic' reaction in some foals if they feel they are cornered and can not escape.
5. You can begin by simply placing your arms lightly around the foal and move with it as it moves around the stall or corral. Talk gently to it and encourage it to accept your touch and 'cradle'.

## Instinct of foals

Foals when born, naturally from instinct, move towards pressure. For the first three to five days, a foal's eyesight is very poor. They can make out large shadows, but not details of things around them. In case of danger, the foal must be able to get to their feet quickly, align their bodies up with their mother's, and instinctually move into that pressure. This will ensure that they do not 'lose' their mother as she moves around.

As a handler of a foal you must teach them to develop a 'new' reaction to pressure.

### First lesson in pressure!

We need to teach horses to move *away* from pressure! This can be easily established in the '*cradle*' position.

Apply pressure to the front end of the weanling and the instant it begins to step backwards away from the pressure, *release* the pressure on the front end by taking your arm away slightly from the chest area.

Do the same to the hind end. Place pressure on the hind end with your arm wrapped around the buttocks and the moment the attempt is made by the weanling to step forward, *release* the pressure.

Soon the foal will learn to step forward and back, away from the pressure.

*This is the beginning of the most important lesson a horse can learn!*

Now you can teach it to move sideways from the pressure of your hand by placing your hand on its side or on its hip and applying pressure for it to step sideways.

As it attempts to step sideways away from this pressure - immediately release the pressure (take your hand away).

Soon, you should be able to move the weanling sideways from the pressure of your hand in both directions.

These first lessons in a foal's life with people are important to establishing its attitude and willingness to be around people. Make it positive!